

Paul DeMuro

Supporter & Advocate

Recipient of the NJDA Donald R. Hammergren Distinguished Service Award (1999)



Mr. DeMuro started his career teaching college English. During his time teaching at Ohio State, a friend of his, Jerry Miller, became the Director of Youth Services in Massachusetts. In 1970, Dr. Miller hired Paul to work in the agency. The job was very different from teaching college English; it involved working directly with committed youth. In the course of his almost 50 year career in juvenile justice and child welfare, Mr. DeMuro wore many hats: Superintendent of a facility, Director of Corrections Education, Commissioner of Youth Services, Federal Court Monitor, consultant to the US Department of Justice. Mr. DeMuro stated that he was seen as someone who knew about child welfare and juvenile justice, having worked with a variety of organizations.

Involvement with the National Juvenile Detention Association came later in Mr. De Muro's career. While working as a consultant, he collaborated with Earl Dunlap on a Federal grant system reform project, and they became what would turn out to be life-long colleagues and friends. They found they had a lot of agreement in principle and values in bringing change to the juvenile justice system. Mr. DeMuro never held an official position in the National Juvenile Detention Association, but was a friend, colleague, advisor, and in a good sense, a critic as to what was going on. Mr. DeMuro advised on important national issues in juvenile justice. Mr. DeMuro also encouraged people working in the field, particularly the younger people, to join NJDA. NJDA gave Mr. DeMuro the Hammergren Distinguished Service award in recognition of his long-term commitment to improving conditions for kids in the system. Mr. DeMuro wanted to make this point: "I didn't see myself nor do I think others saw me exclusively as someone just involved with juvenile detention, but involved with kids and the system in general, and how we treat troubled kids and families in America not just in detention--how the system operated, how the courts operated, being that voice for kids and families."

When asked, Mr. DeMuro does not see any one particular issue as being the most important or the least important, but it is always the matter of kids and families, and how the justice and child welfare systems treat them. Mr. DeMuro believes that the critical issues that are facing the National Juvenile Detention Association and National Partnership for Juvenile Services are the need to sustain the organizations and find the funding to continue their work. The challenge is to keep articulating the appropriate values and moving things forward but at the same time not alienate funding sources and power structures. It is often difficult to criticize an organization, government agency or program and advocate for change and be seen as helpful at the same time.

Mr. DeMuro has great respect and friendship with Earl Dunlap, and what he has done in creating the organization. He knows that many of his colleagues in NJDA have good values and are working hard to improve the system. Mr. DeMuro will continue to be supportive of the organization and is proud to be associated with NJDA.